भारत को शामिल करके पूर्वी क्षेत्र में "मुक्त व्यापार क्षेत्र" स्थापित करने का विचार रखती है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो तत्संबंधी ब्यौरा क्या है; और

(ग) सरकार ने इस संबंध में क्या कदम उठाए है?

**वाणिज्य मंत्री (श्री रामकृष्ण हेगड़े) :** (क) से (ग) जी, नही। तथापि, सार्क के सदस्य देशों नामतः बंगला देश, भूटान, नेपाल, भारत, श्रीलंका, मालदीव और पाकिस्तान ने दक्षिण एशिया क्षेत्र में एक मुक्त व्यापार क्षेत्र की स्थापना के बारे में सहमति व्यक्त की है। इस संबंध में करार सन 2001 तक निष्पादित किए जाने की संभावना है।

**Linking of Trade Regulations with Environmental Issues**

804. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the WTO has linked trade regulations with environmental issues in order to impose their own environmental standard on other countries; and

(b) if so, how do Government plan to counter this?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) WTO Agreements do not impose environmental standards in the conduct of trade among countries. However, as a general exception, WTO Members may take measures necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health, or measures relating to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources if such measures are made effective in conjunction with restrictions on domestic production or consumption. Such measures cannot be applied in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner or as disguised restrictions on international trade.

Government is actively participating in the WTO discussions on the relationship between trade and environment. Recently, trade restrictions imposed by another WTO Member for environmental purposes were sucessfully challenged by India in the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism.

**Assessment of Loss by Tobacco Board**

805. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state: -

(a) whether Tobacco Board made any assessment of the potential crop loss in 1998-99 in Andhra Pradesh due to untimely rains and floods;

(b) if so, what is the expected crop yield;

(c) whether it is a fact that tobacco farmers have suffered loss of nurseries; and

(d) what financial assistance is recommended by the Tobacco Board to tobacco farmers in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes. Sir.

(b) The crap yield is expected to be more or less normal.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Tobacco Board has recommended grant of assistance to tobacco farmers in Andhra Pradesh.

**Inquiry into the Conduct of STC Officials**

806. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the CBI is looking into the conduct of senior STC officials in urea import deal this year;

(b) who are the accused officials of STC;

(c) whether it is a fact that two STC Directors refused to sign the contracts suspecting foul play in the deals;

(d) whether the CBI is trying to protect the guilty by diluting the charges; and